

the aesthetics of disgust and ecstasy in fellatio and facial climaxes

I want to examine some basic aspects of sexual representations that highlight the common ground or transfer of meaning between disgust and ecstatic emotion by using a deliberately provocative case. I realize in choosing the category that very few of my readers will in fact be able to grasp my intention and my main argument. Those who will understand it are, I fully expect, only a handful of peer researchers on questions of sexual representation who have worked through much of the controversial material on pornography, representations of sexual activity, and visual culture developed in the past two decades. Because I value their response and reactions, I am going ahead with this project. But also know that others will simply reject it out of hand, or be unwilling or unable to grant it any validity as intellectual investigation.

I have been writing recently about “disgust,” the aversive emotional reaction both as something represented in visual media such as films and as something provoked in viewer reactions by media representations. (note) One of the most common features of this matter is that people are often quite sure about what they know is disgusting. Of course they articulate it for themselves, but they also usually generalize: this is self evidently disgusting (or ought to be for all right thinking individuals). What interests me is that while some people can easily identify what they know to be disgusting, there are other people who find the exact same thing attractive or alluring or intriguing. While this can be discussed as a matter of “taste” and assumed to be an inherent or social or cultural difference, I am talking here about something that is much more profound than a preference for one thing over another (apples rather than oranges, say). The person identifying what is disgusting is almost always unshakably certain of their view, feeling it viscerally, and unable to imagine that another might have an opposite view.

My test case for this investigation is the phenomenon of male ejaculation following fellatio (most typically) or following manual masturbation with the ejaculate ending up on a person’s face. It is widely understood that this pornographic trope had a distinct new life following the success of the landmark US porn film *Deep Throat* (1972) which is often interpreted as the event which established fellatio as a common or popular heterosexual activity. (There were of course earlier examples, but the film seemed to establish a new norm of expectation and behavior for couples.) At the same time, the norm for depiction of sexual climax for men in heterosexual porn was ejaculation outside of the female body. This was “proof” that the sex was real, not simulated, and thus necessary for a commercially effective product (and thus named within the industry the “money shot”). Visitors from Mars, trying to understand human sex and reproduction, if going only on available visual representations, would assume that a heterosexual intercourse ended “naturally” with the man ejaculating on some part of the woman’s body while she groaned in ecstatic pleasure from having the liquid spurt onto her buttocks, back, belly, or face.

Finale of *Behind the Green Door*

Particularly for anti-pornography feminists, this patently manufactured convention was easy to hold up as an absurd and offensive example of misogynistic male fantasy.

Actual social practice

Fellatio as safer sex

Proliferation of internet pornographies